

# HOUSE BILL REPORT

## HB 2088

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**As Reported by House Committee On:**  
Early Learning & Children's Services

**Title:** An act relating to supporting the needs of children who have been in foster care.

**Brief Description:** Supporting the needs of children who have been in foster care.

**Sponsors:** Representatives Darneille, Pettigrew, Ericks, Kenney, O'Brien, Appleton, Campbell, Pedersen, Linville, Moeller, Green, Schual-Berke, Simpson, Ormsby and Roberts.

**Brief History:**

**Committee Activity:**

Early Learning & Children's Services: 2/1/08, 2/4/08 [DPS].

**Brief Summary of Substitute Bill**

- Permits certain foster youth to return to foster care after age 18 for the purpose of earning a high school diploma or pursuing post-secondary education.
- Requires a study of programs and services for youth transitioning out of foster care.

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### HOUSE COMMITTEE ON EARLY LEARNING & CHILDREN'S SERVICES

**Majority Report:** The substitute bill be substituted therefor and the substitute bill do pass. Signed by 6 members: Representatives Kagi, Chair; Roberts, Vice Chair; Haler, Ranking Minority Member; Walsh, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Goodman and Pettigrew.

**Minority Report:** Do not pass. Signed by 1 member: Representative Hinkle.

**Staff:** Sydney Forrester (786-7120).

**Background:**

In general, most foster care benefits are available to children through the age of 18. There are, however, a few exceptions where youth can receive services or remain in a foster care placement beyond the age of 18. For example, a child may remain in a foster care placement up until the age of 19 years for the purpose of completing high school or equivalent training.

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In this case, the youth continues to qualify for title IV-E federal funding under the Social Security Act. As a result of the enactment of HB 2002 in the 2006 Legislative Session, up to 50 foster youth per year, through 2008, may be allowed to remain in their foster care placements until age 21 for the purpose of completing a post-secondary educational or vocational program.

Youth between the ages of 18 and 21 who were formerly in foster care also may be eligible to receive independent living skills (ILS) services or transitional services if they meet certain criteria. These services can include supports relating to housing, counseling, employment, education, or other appropriate services to complement the youth's own efforts to achieve self-sufficiency. These services may be funded by the state, Medicaid, or other federal money under the Chafee Foster Care Independence Program.

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### **Summary of Substitute Bill:**

Beginning in September 2008, the Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS) is permitted to allow foster youth who age out of care to return to foster care within six months of leaving care under voluntary agreements for the purpose of allowing youth to pursue post-secondary education or job training. Youth who left care before reaching the age of 19 without completing high school or an equivalency program also may return to care for the purpose of earning a diploma or equivalency certificate.

Foster youth are included in the category of persons for whom the Individual Development Account (IDA) match-moneys may be used, and foster youth are added to the category of persons eligible to receive financial counseling and related services from IDA sponsoring organizations.

The Washington State Institute for Public Policy (WSIPP) is directed to conduct a national review of state programs for youth transitioning out of foster care to independence, and to survey foster youth and foster parents in Washington regarding the needs of youth aging out of care. A preliminary report is due from the WSIPP September 1, 2008, and a final report is due December 1, 2008.

### **Substitute Bill Compared to Original Bill:**

The substitute bill:

- (1) removes provisions of the bill relating to establishing and making annual contributions to individual development accounts for foster youth and requiring a pilot program for a community coordinator;
- (2) revises the provision relating to foster youth returning to foster care; and
- (3) adds a provision for a study and survey by the Washington State Institute for Public Policy.

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**Appropriation:** None.

**Fiscal Note:** Requested on February 5, 2008.

**Effective Date of Substitute Bill:** The bill takes effect 90 days after adjournment of session in which the bill is passed.

**Staff Summary of Public Testimony:**

(In support) The original bill was based on proposals from the Greater Pierce County Community Development Network. During the interim we reexamined this bill and received input from additional stakeholders. The substitute bill removes the pilot project, recognizing the need to learn more about what is needed for youth transitioning from foster care.

By allowing youth who have aged out of care to return for the purpose of completing high school or college, we can begin to address the very low graduation rate of foster youth and the low rate of post-secondary education participation. When youth leave foster care, they frequently have very few resources or assets upon which to build. Youth who age out of foster care without the foundational skills for successful independence are likely to sink deeper into poverty. The state should recognize some duty to foster youth who have aged out of care without ever achieving permanency. This bill would give those youth who are committed to an educational goal the support they need to achieve it.

(Opposed) None.

**Persons Testifying:** Representative Darnielle, prime sponsor; Helen Myrick and Stephenie Burnach, Greater Pierce County Community Network; and Gary Malkasian.

**Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying:** None.